N° 91. SATURDAY, *October* 28, 1786.

IT is the obſervation of an elegant author *, "That there is a ſublime and tender melan- "choly, almoſt the univerſal attendant of ge- "nius, which is too apt to degenerate into "gloom and diſguſt with the world." I have frequently had occaſion to mark the juſtice of this obſervation; and it is with much regret that I have ſometimes ſeen men of taſte, and delicacy of feeling, have a tendency to indulge in habits of gloom, deſpondency, and diſreliſh of the world. There is a certain ſtandard of virtue and propriety, which a man of delicacy is apt to form in his own mind, but which, in the common events of the world, is rarely to be met with;—there are certain ideas of elevated and ſublime happineſs which a man of a highly cultivated mind has a diſpoſition to indulge, which it is hardly poſſible can be realized. When, therefore, a perſon of this diſpoſition comes abroad into the world, when he meets with folly where he expected wiſdom, falſehood in

* Dr. Gregory.

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the room of honour, coarseneſs inſtead of delicacy, and ſelfiſhneſs and inſenſibility where he had formed high ideas of generoſity and refinement, he is apt to fall under the dominion of melancholy, and to ſee the world in a gloomy point of view. Such a man, if he is not at pains to guard againſt it, runs ſome riſk of contracting a degree of habitual diſguſt at mankind, and becoming miſanthropical to a certain extent.

It will not, however, be that ſpecies of miſanthropy which takes delight in the miſeries of mankind; on the contrary, it will be a feeling of diſguſt ariſing from diſappointed benevolence, mingled with pity and compaſſion for the follies and weakneſſes of men. I doubt much if there exiſts in the world a complete *miſanthrope*, in the darkeſt ſenſe of that word, a perſon who takes pleaſure in the wretchedneſs of others. If there does, it is impoſſible to conceive ſufficient deteſtation at ſuch a character. But the miſanthropy of which I ſpeak is of a much ſofter kind, and borders nearly on the higheſt degree of *philanthropy*. It ſeems indeed to be the child of philanthropy, and to proceed from too much ſenſibility, hurt by diſappointment in the benevolent and amiable feelings.

It is a common and a juſt remark, that where a ſtrong friendſhip has ſubſiſted, if that friendſhip is once broken by the fault of either party,

it is difficult to prevent a certain degree of hatred and disgust from taking place. The more susceptible the two persons were of the strong attachments of friendship, the more warmly and the more closely they were once united, so much the more difficult does it become to bring about a re-union or reconcilement. The sanguine and romantic opinions they had formed of one another's worth, and the disappointment which both or either of them feel from the behaviour of the other, inflicts a wound which rankles in the soul, and prevents all future confidence. The same conduct in another person not so dear, with whom there was not so close an union, would have been passed over, and made little impression; the former distant and cold acquaintance would have gone on as usual, and forgiveness would easily have taken place.

Somewhat similar to the situation of a person who has been disappointed in the conduct of one from whom he expected much happiness and much friendship, is that of him who, having conceived warm and elevated notions of the world, has been disappointed in all these better expectations. The world, with its pursuits, will appear in an unfavourable light; he will be apt to quit its society, and to indulge in solitude his gloomy reflections. His dislike of the world, however, will be of a calm and gentle kind; it

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will rather be pity than hatred; tho' he may think ill of the ſpecies, he will be kind to individuals; he may diſlike man, but will aſſiſt John or James.

Shakeſpeare, from whoſe writings much knowledge of the human heart is to be acquired, has preſented us, in ſeveral of his characters, with a hiſtory of that melancholy and miſanthropy I have deſcribed above.

Of the character of Hamlet, one of my predeceſſors * has given a delineation which appears to me to be a juſt one. Naturally of the moſt amiable and virtuous diſpoſition, and endued with the moſt exquiſite ſenſibility, he is unfortunate; and his misfortunes proceed from the crimes of thoſe with whom he was the moſt nearly connected, for whom he had the ſtrongeſt feelings of natural affection. From theſe circumſtances, he is hurt in his ſoul's tendereſt part; he is unhinged in his principles of action, falls into melancholy, and conceives diſguſt at the world: yet amidſt all his diſguſt, and the miſanthropy which he at times diſcovers, we conſtantly perceive, that goodneſs and benevolence are the prevailing features of his character; amidſt all the gloom of his melancholy, and the agitation in which his calamities involve him, there are occaſional outbreakings of a mind richly

* Mirror, N° 99, 100.

endowed by nature, and cultivated by education. Had Hamlet poſſeſſed leſs ſenſibility, had he not been ſo eaſily hurt by the calamities of life, by the crimes of the perſons with whom he was connected, he would have preſerved more equanimity, he would not have been the prey of dark deſponding melancholy; the world and all its uſes would not have appeared to him "ſtale, "flat, and unprofitable; an unweeded garden "that grows to ſeed, poſſeſſed merely by things "rank and groſs in nature."

In the play of "*As you like it*," there is brought upon the ſtage a perſonage of a more fixed and ſyſtematic melancholy than that of Hamlet. Hamlet's melancholy and diſguſt with the world, is occaſioned by the particular nature of the misfortunes he meets with. But in *Jaques* we ſee a ſettled and confirmed melancholy, not proceeding from any misfortune peculiar to himſelf, but ariſing from a general feeling of the vanity of the world, and the folly of thoſe engaged in its purſuits. His melancholy is therefore more ſettled than that of Hamlet, and is in truth more deeply rooted. He takes no ſhare in the enjoyments of life, but abandons ſociety, and lives in ſolitude. Hamlet, wounded to the heart by the misfortunes which befal him, and irritated by the crimes of others, feels more poignantly at the time. The feelings of Jaques

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are more general, and therefore the more calm, but from that very cause are deeper and more fixed. It is to be observed, however, that the melancholy and misanthropy of Jaques, like that of Hamlet, proceeds from excess of tenderness, from too much sensibility to the evils of the world and the faults of mankind. His moralizing on the poor sequestered stag, is a most beautiful illustration of his tenderness, and of his nice perception and sorrow for the follies and vices of men;—as his comparison of the world to a stage affords a highly finished picture of the estimation in which he holds human life.

In "*Timon of Athens*," we are presented with a character in many respects different from that of Hamlet or Jaques. Here we have misanthropy of a much darker hue. Soured with disappointment; fallen from the height of prosperity into the lowest state of adversity; deceived by flattering friends; forsaken by the buzzing attendants on wealth and greatness, Timon conceives disgust at the world and its enjoyments; and that disgust produces hatred and aversion at mankind. Yet even here it is observable, that with all Timon's misanthropy, there is a great mixture of original goodness and benevolence. At his first outset in life he was unsuspicious, and wished to contribute to the happiness of all around him. "Being free himself, he thought

"all others ſo." Diſappointed in the opinion he had formed of the world, and ſhocked with the ingratitude he met with; "brought low," as he is ſaid to be, "by his own heart, undone "by goodneſs," he becomes a prey to deep gloom and miſanthropy; but with all his miſanthropy, he preſerves a ſenſe of honour and of right.

It is to be admitted, however, that as Timon's is a character much inferior to, and much leſs amiable than that of Hamlet or of Jaques, ſo his miſanthropy is of a much blacker and more ſavage nature. Hamlet's miſanthropy ariſes from a deep ſenſe of the guilt of others;—Jaques's from a general impreſſion of the follies and weakneſſes of the world;—Timon's is produced by a ſelfiſh ſenſe of the ingratitude of others to himſelf. His diſguſt at the world, therefore, is not mixed with the ſame gentleneſs and amiable tenderneſs which is diſplayed by the other two; and he poſſeſſes as much miſanthropy of the blackeſt ſort as it is poſſible for human nature to arrive at. Shakeſpeare indeed holds him forth as a perſon altogether bereft of reaſon. He ſeems to have thought, that ſuch a degree of miſanthropy as Timon is deſcribed to be poſſeſſed of, was inconſiſtent with the uſe of that faculty.

In the criticiſm on Hamlet which I before quoted, it is obſerved, that amidſt all his melancholy

choly and gloom, there is a great deal of gaiety and playfulneſs in his deportment. The remark is certainly juſt, and it may be extended to the other characters of Shakeſpeare above taken notice of. Notwithſtanding the ſettled dejection of Jaques, he is deſcribed as poſſeſſing an uncommon degree of humour. He himſelf tells us, "he is often wrapped in a moſt humorous ſad-"neſs." The account which he gives of the motley fool he met with in the foreſt, and the deſcription of the ſeven ages of human life, are lively inſtances of this ſtrong feature in his character.

Even Timon, black as his melancholy appears, is not without an humour in his ſadneſs. The joke put by him on his worthleſs friends, in inviting them to dinner when he had none to give them, the converſation between him and Apemantus, and the laſt ſcene with the Poet and Painter, are ſufficient confirmations of this remark.

The diſpoſition in all theſe characters to a certain degree of jocularity and ſportiveneſs, is far from being unnatural. On the contrary, I am diſpoſed to think that ſomething of this kind takes place in every perſon who is under the influence of melancholy. There is no doubt that the mind may be ſo much overwhelmed, as to be incapable of reliſhing any degree of ſportiveneſs

neſs or of gaiety; but when the firſt paroxiſms of grief are over, when the violent effects of overwhelming diſtreſs, which cannot long continue, have ſubſided, and when the mind has aſſumed a tone perhaps equally diſtreſſing, but more laſting and calm, and even more thoughtful, there is no time when the effect of a joke will be more eaſily perceived, or better underſtood.

This may perhaps be accounted for, by a few obſervations on the ſtate of the mind in ſuch circumſtances, with which I ſhall conclude the preſent Paper.

A perſon under the influence of melancholy, or indeed of any paſſion whatever, muſt frequently become a ſpectator of his own mind *; muſt often be led to view his own feelings in the light in which they will appear to others. Viewing them in this light, and in the ſituation of perſons not under the ſame prejudice, they may appear to him very differently from what is his own habitual impreſſion; and in this ſituation he may entertain ſomewhat of a diſpoſition to ſmile at himſelf, and to admit of a joke even at his own expence. The gentleneſs of Hamlet's ſpirit made him anxious to accommodate himſelf, and bring down his own feelings to a level

* See Theory of Moral Sentiment.

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with thoſe of the perſons around him; and therefore, on all occaſions, even in the deepeſt melancholy, he engages in pleaſantry of converſation; he even ventures to joke with Horatio on his mother's marriage, which was the great cauſe of all his ſorrow.

If, as ſome philoſophers have maintained, ridicule ariſes from contraſt, there is no ſituation, provided we are capable of perceiving ridicule at all, in which the ridiculous will appear in a ſtronger point of view, than when the mind is under the dominion of melancholy. The very ſituation muſt heighten the contraſt. The circumſtance of *Cromwell* and his aſſociate bedaubing one another's faces with ink, while they were in the act of ſigning the warrant for the death of the King; or that of Lord *Lovat* with the ſuds on his beard kiſſing *Hogarth*, who had come to ſteal a drawing of him the day before his execution; would have been childiſh at any other time.

When a perſon is in a melancholy frame of mind, ſuch a melancholy as leads him to view the world and all its purſuits in a gloomy point of view, this is apt to produce a ſort of elevation above the world, and an indifference about every thing that is going on in it. The great and the low, the rich and the poor, the buſy and the idle, are all ſeen with equal unconcern, as paſſing

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through a few years to that period, when all their projects will be buried in the grave.

Divesne, prisco natus ab Inacho,
Nil interest, an pauper, et infima
De gente, sub dio moreris,
Victima nil miserantis Orci.
Omnes eodem cogimur.——

Such a person may feel some gratification in letting himself down from the melancholy eminence from which he views human life; and, considering all its occupations as frivolous alike, it will rather flatter than hurt his pride, to join in the trifling jest or idle merriment.

He who is under the pressure of grief, under the influence of sorrow, occasioned by some calamity, may at times feel a sort of gratification in escaping from his own mind, and from the dominion of his melancholy. To use the words of an author who has a peculiar talent at expressing the nice feelings of the human heart: "There is a certain kind of trifling, in which a "mind not much at ease can sometimes indulge "itself. One feels an escape, as it were, from "the heart, and is fain to take up with lighter "company. It is like the theft of a truant boy, "who goes to play for a few minutes, while his "master is asleep, and throws the chiding for his "task upon futurity."

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Such a diſpoſition of mind, however, with all that intereſt which it exerts in us, with all the privileges it may claim, and all the pleaſantry it may at times enjoy, is nevertheleſs deeply to be regretted in others, and anxiouſly to be avoided in ourſelves. I muſt the more earneſtly warn my readers againſt the indulgence of this ſort of melancholy diſpoſition; becauſe, in its firſt ſtages, there is ſomething gratifying, ſomething which flatters and captivates: But if allowed to grow into a habit, it unhinges every better faculty of the mind; it deſtroys the uſefulneſs, and blaſts the enjoyment of life.

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